

A Study of Festival Theatre to Flekstival Theatre: Emuodje Flekstival of Ekakpamre in Southern Nigeria as a Paradigm

by

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Abstract

The originality and authenticity of traditional African festivals is not far-fetched from the fact that they are constructs on the communion and reunion between the celebrants and the ancestors – the supernatural beings. Festival is a periodic occasion, of communion between gods, the living and the dead. In fact, rituals form the nucleus of traditional African festivals. However, in recent times, the sacred components of traditional African festivals have been watered down, and it becomes difficult to decipher the significance of these festivals from mere entertainments. Hence, the secular components in recent times have become pivotal in traditional African festivals. Consequently, this study argues that ritual festivals in Nigeria have, to a great extent, lost the ritual potency for which they originated. I further explore transition from festival theatre, to flekstival theatre, using Emuodje flekstival of Ekakpamre people of Southern Nigeria, as a paradigm. Analytical and historical methods and unstructured interview methods are employed. Critical works in journals and chapters in books define the literary and theoretical foundation for this study. Among other findings, it has come to the fore that periodic celebrations in African societies may be categorised into festival theatre, quasi-festival theatre and flekstival theatre.

I also discovered that most traditional African festivals can be located in the framework of festival theatre. I conclude that although *Emuodje* festival has lost its sacred gaze, there is still a lot in it to facilitate a full discourse in traditional African festival. Consequently, I recommend that in the light of cultural convergence, authenticity and originality of traditional Nigerian festivals should not be fully discarded.

Keywords: traditional, African festival, Festival theatre, *Emuodje*, Ekakpamre

Introduction

There are metaphysical forces that control the affairs of the living as well as dictate and determine the existence of humanity. Covenants and oaths, form the nucleus for the continuous relationship of goodwill between these supernatural forces and the living. The regeneration, rejuvenation and renewal of the pacts, oaths and covenants between the living and the supernatural beings, is manifested with the medium of festivals. Festivals therefore, act as a bridge-a nexus between gods and the society. Furthermore, festival is a medium through which the historical is made known, regenerated and rejuvenated.

African societies are delineated with their cultural practices. These cultural practices encompass their mode of dressing, the language with which communication is effected, the kind of food they eat, the system of governance, and so on. Beyond the socio-cultural, political and the economic gamut, is the spiritual plane. The spiritual facet does not only control the other planes, it is also manifested in festivals. Festival has the cultural constituents of a people, manifested in it, hence, festival is found in culture as much as culture is found in festivals. The implication of the above assertion is that festival is predicated on the culture of a people. Most festivals in African societies are rich in ritual aesthetics. Thus, AbdulRasheed Adeoye articulates that “these ritual festivals are based on the remembrance of some heroes, their deeds and events of immense significance” (112).

The ritualisation, deification and mystification of the heroic figures being remembered and celebrated, forms the authenticity of traditional African festivals. The originality of traditional African festival, is not far-fetched from the fact that, it is an event created for the communion and reunion between the living and their ancestors and also, it is a periodic occasion, for the meeting of gods and mortals. In fact, rituals nay, the sacred, form the nucleus of traditional African festivals. However, in recent times, the sacred constituents of these festivals have been watered down, and it becomes difficult to decipher the core of the festival from mere entertainment. Hence, the secular components in recent times, have become pivotal in traditional African festivals. Consequently, this study, argues that ritual festivals in Nigerian, have-to a great extent, lost the ritual potency for which they originated. I further explore transition from festival theatre, to festival theatre, using *Emuodje* festival of Ekakpamre people of Southern Nigeria, as a paradigm.

A Conceptual Clarification on Flekstival

Flekstival is a portmanteau word for “Fleks” and “Tival” (culled from festival. Fleks is a slang in Nigeria and some parts in Africa, and it means enjoy, have fun, amusement or delight in. My concept and notion of flekstival is the secularisation of traditional African festivals. In recent times, the sacred constituents of these festivals have been watered down, that it is difficult to decipher the core of the festival from mere entertainment value. Festival becomes flekstival, when there is a transition, nay, a transformation from its sacred value, to the secular.

A Retrospect on Festival theatre in Nigeria

The manifestation of festivals in Nigerian cum African traditional societies is an indicator of the uniquely laden culture inherent in these societies. In fact, in Africa, there is hardly a society without one form of festival, or the other. This is exemplified in *Egungun* culture and tradition expressed in *Egungun* festival. Moreso, some major festivals inherent in Nigeria, are *Oyise-Owhe* Festival in Owhe, Isoko land, *Alapata* masquerade festival in Osun state, *Osun-Osogbo*, *Ogun*, *Sango* and *Obatala* festivals in Yoruba land, *Oramfe* festival in Ondo town, *Obalogun* festival in Iloko, “*Oromo* festival in Ethiopia” (Dugo, 51), among others. These festivals are a re-enactment of significant occurrences and feats in a particular culture. While “the annual *Egungun festival* is connected with the remembrance of departed ancestors, *Obalogun* festival is celebrated in honour of Obalogun, a great warrior and a deified hero” (Vidal, 234).

The foregoing portends that festivals are a salutation, a commemoration a documentation and the historification of the past as Adeoye (79) also submits that “ritual festivals are based on the remembrance of some heroes, their deeds and events of immense significance”. In other words, festivals are socio-historical constructs. They are a basic constituent of the culture of a people. Explicitly, they are an expression of the culture of a people. Hence, citing Jas Amankulor, Anigala (17) defines festival as “a periodic or occasional celebration, merry-making or feast day of special significance in the cultural calendar of the celebrants”. Festival is a periodic event. Every festival is periodic. There is a specific time of the year set aside for every festival. It could be on annual basis in the case of *Emuodje* festival, once in three years or once in every five years in the case of *Oyise-Owhe* festival of the Owhe people in Isoko land. Festivals conform to the cultural calendar of a people. Every festival involves celebrants. They are usually the community people. “The festival which may involve one or more activities is an occasion for general merriment or rejoicing. During most festivals, the celebrants usually throw their door open to entertain visitors and neighbours, as a sign of friendship and goodwill” (Anigala, 17). In the metaphysical plane, the celebrants are the spirit beings. The spirit characters that are being celebrated, join in the celebration, as it is believed that festivals facilitate a communion between the living and the living dead in course of the celebration and merry-making.

Festivals are also celebrated, either to appease, pacify the metaphysical beings or to remember a heroic deed such as Sango, Ogun, Osun, Ifa, Yemoja, *Emuodje* and *Ijakadi* festivals respectively. Here in lies the ritualistic facet of traditional African festivals. Noting the point of divergence between the western and African traditional theatre modes, Enekwe (152) notes that “while the mainstream European theatre is syllogistic in form, the Asian and African theatres are ritualistic”. Specifically, most traditional African festivals and festival theatres are ritual laden. In fact, ritual forms the nucleus of most festivals. Hence, Omatsola (371) articulates the presence of ritual in his study of *Umale-Ude* (leg rattle masquerade) masquerade festival. He states that “dance is also a ritual drama and theatre”. Indigenous Nigerian festivals are embodiment of rituals, these rituals most times serve as a means of salutation to the spirit beings. “Man as a material being in a material world, fears what we perceives as immaterial, for it cannot be contained or dominated. This defensive impulse is to concretise, to make the invisible visible, the infinite finite, and the superhuman human” (Horn, 183).

Ritual festivals therefore, make the invisibles, visible. These rituals are expressed artistically. In the display of the ritualistic, the theatrical abounds. In fact, drama is located in the rituals performed. Traditional African Festivals are a display of various arts as Rotimi (77) corroborates that “ritual displays that reveal in their style of presentation, in their purpose, and value, evidences of imitation, enlightenment and or entertainment, can be said to be drama.” These arts include character (acting), mime, masks, costumes, dance, story, music and song and performance arena. These features are characteristic of ritual festivals. For every festival, there is a story. “This story is organised on an episodic basis” (Ogunba, 22).

Masquerading in traditional African festivals, serve ritual function. Spirit beings are represented with masks. Masquerades are believed to be the spirits of dead ancestors and late heroes. Masquerades abound in most festivals because, festivals “are organized around nature forces, deities, divinities, supernatural events, myths and legends” (Anigala, 17). Masquerading in most cultures in Africa is patriarchal in nature. In some societies, the women folk are not allowed to see the masquerade, while in other societies, only members of the masquerade cult are allowed to see it because of its ritual potency. Hence, “the pretence of the non-initiate members of the audience, especially the female members, not to know the secret of masquerading can be seen as a ritual theatrical convention that allows for aesthetic distance” (Enekwe, cited in Ogundeji, 8). Generally speaking, “masquerading is a cult of the ancestors. During the festivals, most masks of the dead fathers are brought out, using theatrical effects as a means of ritual celebration” (Ogundeji, 4-5).

Song and music arts are used to communicate in traditional African festivals. Perhaps, there is no festival that does not incorporate song and music. In some cultures, new songs are invented every year. In the same vein, Anolabu and Dopamu (44) maintains that “songs in traditional worship convey the faith of the worshippers, their belief in and about the divinity or the living dead may emphasize their assurance and hopes with reference to the hereafter”

The place of music and songs as elements that aid dramatic realisation in festivals cannot be overemphasised. Music and songs could be sung to praise the ancestors and spirit beings. Songs also transport the celebrants into trance. They could be transported into another plane of existence-the metaphysical plane. Another element of ritual festival, is dance. Dance theatre is a ritual component of traditional African festivals. Some of the dances are ritual embedded. Hence, Traore (2) notes that dance “reproduces the passions and actions of men in order to express a collective emotion, to teach a religious rite or simply to entertain. It can also enact a legend or a story”.

One paramount feature of ritual festival is the performance arena. In a traditional African festival theatre setting, the performance area is the market square, the stream, the forest or in front of the palace. The performance arena is a flexible one. In festivals with sacred undertones, the forest and streams are mostly utilised. Sacrifices are presented by the priests and priestesses to the supernatural beings in the rivers and forests where they reside. In ritual festival, audience participation in the performance is restricted and limited. “An audience watches the performance but participate in it only to a limited degree. When the distinction between audience and participant entirely dissolves, the form has been transmuted and should never be called theatre, as there is no seeing.” (Horn, 195).

From Festival theatre to Flekstival Theatre

Despite the change which has overtaken masquerading and left it a monument to a vital principle of traditional religion among these peoples, it is developing along other channels. It has now become an entertainment and a source of amusement in their lives (Nzekwu, 133).

Flekstival theatre is that traditional festival theatre that is devoid of ritual. In fact, Flekstival is the aftermath of demystification and demythologisation of festival. Furthermore, in flekstival theatre, the dramatic and theatrical arts of music, dance, impersonation or acting, costuming and masking, properties, performance arena and so on, are prone to change in the transformation process. For instance, all over the decades and centuries in Nigeria cum Africa, masquerading has undergone a gradual alteration. Hence, Nzekwu (133) notes that:

Masquerading has lost most of the religious ideas which brought it into being and sustained it.... Unfortunately nowadays masquerading is often scorned and misrepresented by the younger generation who decry it as a mere fraud, a device of the man desiring to terrify and dominate his womenfolk.

The implication of the gradual secularisation and transformation in the theatrical and dramatic arts is that, it facilitates modification of the festival (which is now known as flekstival) from its sacredness, into the gamut of entertainment. This implies that flekstival theatre is entertainment (and sometimes, information and education) situated. In this instance, the society, and not only the chief priest, determines the plot and direction of the flekstival as Anigala (25) copiously avers that “traditional festival dramas are products of their society. It is only to be expected therefore that the style of presentation should be determined by the society whose experiences it enacts”.

Flekstival theatre therefore, is the result of innovation, nay, cultural advancement, to satisfy the taste of contemporary man in a postmodern society. In a thesis on the secularisation of Mmanwu festival, Okwudili (168) states that “in the modern period, the old religious ideas which gave the Igbo Mmanwu its life and sustained its social function, have all but disappeared”. Hence, “Mmanwu has acquired a new image, one that is geared toward a secular role. For this reason, the great awe and request attributed to the old Mmanwu’s image has been lost” (Okwudili, 168). Although many reasons could be attributed to this transformation, “the transatlantic trade was more instrumental. Other reasons for this change include the pursuit for material wealth, social polarization of town-states and the coming of alien religion and colonial rule” (Okwudili, 112).

The outcome of this change, is the deritualisation of theatrical elements in festivals, such as dance. Dance is an integral art in festivals as it can easily communicate a message to the spectators. “Dance in itself can be given an artistic life and within its traditional limits be expected to reach a high level of achievement. While it may involve the repetition of familiar movements and gestures, yet, the rich elaboration of a basic story may evoke a genuine aesthetic experience” (Anigala, 35). With this, the metaphysical essence cum utility of dance is removed, and what there is, is the entertainment functionality. In flekstival theatre, “songs function as a link for dramatic transition from one event to the other” (Anigala, 84). The composed songs enhance dramatic characterization, intensify dramatic mood, propel action, enhance plot narration and encourage audience participation. The songs explain the themes and enhance dramatic action. It also facilitates plot development. Songs also serve as a nexus between the episodic dramatic events.

In flekstivals, performances take place in the market square or in front of the traditional ruler’s palace. Oftentimes, the theatre in the round also known as arena stage is utilized as this facilitates the actors-audience rapport. Hence, a flekstival theatre or a theatre of communion is created. In a constructive appraisal of the above assertion, Anigala (37) posit that the performance arena is “where spectators watch the dramatic action as it is performed. The space arena or designated spot of performance is effectively utilized by the actor or performer to convey his message”. Furthermore, flekstival theatre facilitates communal cohesion. Indeed, festivals “still continue to constitute important events by which people living in the same geographical orbit are brought together” (Vidal, 227).

A Retrospect on *Emuodje* Festival

Emuodje festival of Ekakpamre, is situated in a tale of revolution-war. Various versions of the origin of *Emuodje* festival abound. This could be attributed to the absence of adequate documentation of the derivation of the festival. However, two theories are held sacrosanct due to their originality and authenticity. In the beginning, there was Irikrakpoamre, the defunct name of Ekakpamre. In a personal interview with Joan Shaba (2015), she states that:

Emuodje festival cannot be separated from the soul of Irikrakpoamre. Irikrakpoamre was a woman whom the community was to be named after later. In those days, Uvwi, a warrior who hailed from Antledja, a part of Agbarho, terrorized Irikrakpoamre community.

In the quest for supremacy, Uvwi terrorized Irikrakpoamre. “Due to the casualties incurred by Irikrakpoamre, the people decided to make a pact with Uvwi by giving a woman to him in marriage”. Inter-tribal marriage was a medium with which conflicts were resolved. Irikrakpoamre’s beautiful daughter was given to Uvwi, to pacify his quest for blood and wealth. However, the reverse was the case as the giant continued to terrorise the community. Nevertheless, Irikrakpoamre’s daughter had a mission. Her obligation was to find the source of Uvwi’s strength and report it to her people to facilitate the killing of Uvwi. After two attempts to persuade him into telling her the secret behind her power, he finally disclosed the source of his strength to her on the third occasion.

Having known his secret, the wife waited for a good opportunity to fulfill the real reason for which she married Uvwi. Some days later, Uvwi went to war and the wife brought out a mortar, the source of Uvwi’s strength. After some time, she discovered the mortar moving. She quickly sat on it. The mortar continued to shake vigorously, but she refused to stand up. Suddenly, the movement stopped and news reached Antledja, that their warrior was dead. The wife, who was never suspected, ran to Irikrakpoamre to relay the news. There was jubilation and merriment and the wife was celebrated. Hence, the annual celebration of *Emuodje* festival. *Emuodje* means “let us run and celebrate it any how, or without proper co-ordination.” Like most festivals in traditional African societies in general and Nigeria in particular, *Emuodje* festival of the Ekakpamre people is a festival that is celebrated for the heroic deed carried out by a woman. From its inception till date, it is celebrated between the months of August and September. Furthermore, beyond the re-enactment of the Uvwi escapade, in the festival, *Emuodje* festival also sees the gods of the land, being propitiated and appeased before the festival commences. It has “spiritual relevance for both actors and spectators? (Clark, 57). Ekakpamre people play the role of gods to portray that the gods are present with them. In other words, this facilitates a communion between ancestral spirits and man. In its inception, *Emuodje* festival incorporated the sacred elements listed below:

Ritual Aesthetics of *Uvwi Ese*:

Uvwi, the warrior defeated by Irikrakpoamre's daughter, was deified after his death. Hence, the chief priest, or an *Osuvwi* is appointed to call or invite the spirit of Uvwi before the festival begins. The process of inviting Uvwi is what is known as *Uvwi Ese*. The *Osuvwi* or the priest must be righteous, pure and blameless. He is like a sacrificial scapegoat who carries the poverty of the community. It is characterized with the concept of the carrier in traditional Nigerian cum African cosmology. One of such *Osuvwi*, was Warri Dafiohwo, who executed this responsibility for a long time before his death. Tradition has it that every *Osuvwi* hailed from either Ekroghen or Ekenewharen streets.

The potency and efficacy of *Emuodje* festival is evaluated with rain. When *Emuodje* festival begins, it is conventional for rain, a sacred component to accompany it. When it does not rain, a rainmaker is called upon to make it. The presence of rain symbolizes the acceptability of the festival by the supernatural beings (ancestors and gods). When it does not rain, it is believed that the propitiations and sacrifices had been rejected by the gods.

Ritual Aesthetics of *Songs and Dances*

Songs are integral part of traditional African festivals. Apart from being a medium of communication, it is also medium through which interaction is effected with the Supernatural forces. "Songs provide the basis for dramatisation" (Vidal, 41). For every festival, there is a story. The stories of traditional African societies are embedded in the songs sung in the festivals. In fact, citing KwabenaNketia's on African gods and music, Ofofu (41) submits that "African gods are music loving, who manifest themselves when their special music is performed. This possibly explains that religious music in Africa is culture and cult specific, and unless the right kind of music is performed worship will have no impact on the devotees". *Emuodje* Festival songs accelerate spiritual communion as the song below posits:

Urhobo

Anya vwa Whedjo

Uvwiooo

Uvwiooo

English

The gods are coming

Uvwi is coming

Uvwi is coming

The above song is accompanied with *Egbada ele* or rowdy dance. While this song is being sung, leaves are being held in the hands to commemorate the victory over Uvwi of Antledja. Therefore, this song is sacred and sacrosanct. Dancing in Africa transcends the physical. Thus, Akpughe (125) avers that "dance being the connection between man and his supernatural, brings about proper edification of man's spirit and body".

In the context of the metaphysical, nay, the transcendental, dance could be termed, dancequerade, because of its spiritual connotation. Dance is a major feature of *Emuodje* festival. The fundamental characters that comprise of the *Osuwvi* and the performers all dance. Suffice to state that dance is the most integral element in *Emuodje* festival. *Emuodje* dance is a dance of victory. In fact, the term *Emuodje* in the Urhobo language means “Let us run it any how or Let us carry it and run.” Thus, *Emuodje* is synonymous with dance. Dance facilitates characterization in *Emuodje* festival.

Ritual Aesthetics of *Properties and Performance area*

One predominant property, sacred in *Emuodje* festival, is the leave. The use of leaves in the festival is imperative. A personal interview with Joan (2015) reveals that there is a ritual of using leaves in celebrating the festival and at the end of the day, throwing the leaves into the market square which is also a sacred setting or place in the festival celebration.

Emuodje festival utilises a lot of performance area. The most paramount, and ritual embedded performance area, is the market square. Ekakpamre market is replete with two tabernacles arranged and dedicated to the gods and this is called *Ogwan Edjo* or the home of the gods. These houses are reverend and as such, sacrifices are being carried out in them, to pacify the gods and also, to make supplications. The crescendo or apex of *Emuodje* is characterised with all the performers converging at the shrines with the *Osuwvi* with propitiations, being made to the gods. Here, prayers are conducted. The performance area also serves as a place for the propitiation of ancestors or *Esemo*. The spectators or co-performers crowd around him in an arena setting.

Ritual Aesthetics of *Costume and Makeup*

Costumes are physical covering and adornment worn by performers. The acceptability of a specific costume for *Emuodje* festival as tradition demands cannot be overemphasized. The festival incorporates the use of rags. The originality of the use of these rags is predicated on the fact that from the genesis of the festival, celebrants have always used this. “Even though the masquerade art is more than mere costume, costume remains the cornerstone upon which all other elements of the masquerade hinge” (Asigbo, 4).

***Emuodje* as Flekstival Theatre**

Today masquerading has lost most of the religious ideas which brought it into being and sustained it. Yet, at first sight, it still appear to have all the essence, vitality and prestige which characterized it not so long ago (Nzekwu, 131).

Festival becomes flekstival, when there is a transition, nay, a transformation from its sacred value, to the secular. In this context, Ogunbiyi's (3) notes that "a ritual becomes entertainment once it is outside its original context or when the belief that sustains it has lost its potency." This implies that, when ritual leaves its unique framework, the real reason for which it is performed, it becomes entertainment. Beyond the trans-Atlantic slave trade and so on, religion-the proliferation of Pentecostal churches also formed the nucleus to the secularisation of *Emuodje* festival. With the influx of Pentecostal churches in Ekakpamre, the ministers saw the festival as fetishistic. They saw it as an act of worship instituted by the devil. Hence, their members were warned to desist from participating in such a diabolical act. To fully serve God whole heartedly and in spirit and truth, one must not associate oneself with traditional festivals. Erring members were sanctioned, suspended or expelled from church activities. The proliferation of Pentecostal churches, coupled with its adherents in synthesising the traditional with secular, culminated into a gradual and significant secularisation of *Emuodje* festival. *Emuodje* festival, thus, became a flekstival.

In the same vein, celebrants especially the young folk, celebrate the festival in bars and restaurants. *Emuodje* festival has also become a venture for money making. Thus, the male folk wait along the road, requesting money from pedestrians. Un-cooperating pedestrians are either drenched with dirty and muddy water, or harassed. This change became inherent in the theatrical and dramatic components of *Emuodje*. Theatrical elements such as properties, costumes, music and dance, mime and so on, yielded their ritual components.

Flektival Aesthetics of *Properties and Performance area*

From the arena or theatre in the round theatre utilised in *Emuodje* festival, *Emuodjeflektival*, now use the streets as its performance area. After the declaration of the opening of the festival by the *Osuwvi*, the performers begin to exhibit their performances along the road. The street in recent times, serve as an area for the celebration of *Emuodje* flektival.

Flektival Aesthetics of *Costume and Makeup*

Costume is an essential component of traditional African festivals. In *Emuodje* flektival, costumes play a vital role. The major costumes worn by celebrants are made from rags. However, there have been in a change in this trend. Contemporary *Emuodje* celebrants in recent times have made contrary the ethical use of rags as costumes. Young men and boys have incorporated the use of new jean trousers, new shoes and new long and short sleeve clothes. While men are dress in the aforementioned attire, women and young girls dress in European manner. It has turned into an avenue for exhibiting and showcasing new clothes.

The originality of the rags had been secularized because of various reasons. Perhaps, the incorporation of satiric drama pieces, helped in its promotion. The performers portraying the characters been lampooned, wear the exact clothes that fit the characters they portray. Hence, for believability to be achieved the exact costumes are used, and the rags discarded.

Another emerging trend is the switching and swapping of clothes among male and female folk. In other words, women dress in men attire while the male folk dress in women attire. *Emuodje* festival from its inception never incorporated the use of swapping of costumes in its celebration. This swapping of costume which is a recent phenomenon, perhaps is necessitated with an attempt to lampoon the opposite sex. This explicates the poetics of gender polemics even in traditional African societies.

In Ekakpamre and most African societies, powder symbolises victory. Based on victory, which is the thrust of *Emuodje* festival, contemporary *Emuodjeor* flekstival has substituted powder in place of rain. Powder which is a recent phenomenon in *Emuodje* flekstival, is a symbol of victory. However, it is an introductory ingredient in the flekstival.

Flektival Aesthetics of Songs and Dances

It is true that songs are a vital pivotal in the celebration and the success of *Emuodje* festival. Sacred songs are used to adore and pacify the supernatural beings, and also to aid communication with them. However, beyond the ritual songs that are being sung, there are other songs that are being sung. These songs have no sacred undertones in them. A good example of such songs is:

Urhobo

Toto rush water too much
Toto rush water too much
Toto rush water too much
Toto rush water too much

English

Vagina drips water too much
Vagina drips water too much
Vagina drips water too much
Vagina drips water too much

The above song tells us that a woman's private part drips too much of water. It is what is called *Omesuo* in the Urhoboculture. This song is basically for the male folk since it is critical of the female anatomy/body. Women on their part, have songs with which they satirize the male private part as well as the song below posits:

Urhobo

Oshowhuruooooooooo
Oshowhuruooooooooo
Oshowhuruooooooooo

English

Penis is dead oooooooooo
Penis is dead oooooooooo
Penis is dead oooooooooo

Urhobo

Soldier DwuUmukoko
Mimrere
Oduro
Mimrere
Pastor Duro
Mimrere

English

Soldier made love to Umukoko
I saw it
He made love to her
I saw it
Pastor made love to her
I saw it

The above song satirises adulterous men and women. In fact, the names of erring victims are included in the songs as Umukoko is included above. This satirical song makes Ekakpamre people, better people as nobody want their names to be used as a paradigm in the festival. It is believed to instill discipline in married men and women. Thus, the festival serves as a watch dog and a societal police. A good example of another song, is:

Urhobo

Ohworomuosiona
Amerohorokoyinhwere
Ohworomuosiona
Amerohorokoyinhwere

English

He who prevents the rain
Will die from water dripping from vagina
He who prevents the rain
Will die from water dripping from vagina

The above song satirizes rainmakers who use rain to disrupt parties. In Ekakpamre and the Urhobo society in the diaspora, rainmakers use rain to disrupt parties to act as a blackmail with which money can be siphoned from the celebrant for them (the rainmakers) to put a stop to such rain. Hence, this song lampoons this popular action by the rainmakers. Nobody takes an offence from the songs composed. Every year, new songs are composed by celebrants. For pedophiles, a song such as the one below is sung:

Urhobo

Umukoro Odwimitete
Umukoro Odwimitete

English

Umukoro one who makes love to little children
Umukoro one who makes love to little children

The above song is sung by the women folk whenever the men sing the vagina song. Sometimes, they use a stick to portray the penis, putting it between their legs to depict the picture of a phallus. Present celebration of *Emuodje* is characterized with erotic dances. There is the display of orgy as women roll their waist erotically while the men give them the dance step of lovemaking. Sometimes, the women wrap their legs firmly around the waist of the men as the men mime the act of love making with the women moaning. This politics of sexuality in the festival, demystifies, deconstructs, bastardises and demythologises *Emuodje* festival.

Conclusion

Although *Emuodje* festival (now a flekstival) had lost its sacred gaze, there is still a lot in it, to facilitate a full discourse in traditional African festival. Among other findings, it has come to the fore, that, periodic celebrations in African societies may be categorised into festival theatre, quasi-festival theatre and flekstival theatre. I also discovered that most traditional African festivals can be located in the framework of flekstival theatre. I conclude that in the light of cultural convergence, authenticity and originality of traditional Nigerian festivals, should not be fully discarded.

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Interviews

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